The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 51 — OCTOBER 16th, 1940

DEAR MEMBER,

I published in C.N.-L. No. 24 an account by the headmaster of an evacuated school of ways in which the upheaval of evacuation may be turned in a multitude of directions to educational advantage. It reflected a greater variety of practical activity than anything that has appeared in the News-Letter. The author of the article writes to me in a recent letter about another aspect of the same question "What can we do?" Here is part of what he says:

"There is one thing that we should definitely, and consciously, *not* do: we should not in our impatience think that 'doing' always implies a concrete material action involving a direct and visible impact on the material world. If, then, we are not to 'do' something in the usual way—forming committees to get things done, to get evils removed and injustices remedied—what are we to do? Take a concrete instance: what will the difference be between the Christian's and the non-Christian's attitude when the siren goes or the bombs begin to fall? The ordinary man will be disposed to rail against Hitler, he will very likely show a marvellous courage, perhaps even more so than the Christian, and he will come through with head unbowed even if bloody. The question is whether such an attitude towards the war generally, or to life, is adequate to the situation in a positive creative way, or whether the proper response does not lie in a different sphere. You have often emphasised in the News-Letter that any thought or act of faith and charity is something added to the spiritual value of the universe and therefore a move in the right direction.

"It is here that the right answer seems to me to lie. What I believe to be most necessary is that every Christian should work out for himself, or have worked out for him, a sound and persistent content of prayer and meditation which will enable him to create the acts or thoughts of faith and charity. What during raids should be the substance of our prayers and the motive in our activity whatever that may be? Our prayer must be a real wrestling with the Spirit, a real setting ourselves into communion with God and with Christ. Christ in His prayers made Himself the channel for the inflow of grace and power, and the essence of Christianity seems to me to be that we should all do likewise. In the end nothing but such an inflow can be of any real use to us even in the most concrete and material sense: since, as we have all experienced, all material work that is not carried out with charity is of little effect.

"If we believe in prayer we must believe that such channels for grace do exist and can be extended through our own prayers. One of the most eager prayers that we should at all times offer is for the souls of all men to be filled

with the light and life which is Christ, and at these times when death walks abroad that the souls of those who must die may be somehow filled with that light.

"Thus the most important thing that you can do is to build up a group of people who are filled, so far as possible, every moment of their lives with the Christian virtues, and who may become, through their self-discipline and the increasing light and expansion of the Spirit, the modern parallel of the older Initiates.

"And if we are told that all this is unworldly and abstract, I would reply that no man can, and God will not allow him to, spend his time in such self-discipline without a resultant impact on the physical world. To live vertically in the spirit, as we are really compelled to do in these days, must lead to an extension of activity in the horizontal; but this vertical-horizontal cross, which is in a sort of way a counterpart of the Cross of Christ, cannot come into being unless the chief inspiration comes from the vertical. To make ourselves capable of receiving, more and more, that inspiration of the Father and to put it into practice in this world in the imitation of the Son is the finest work we can do at this time to establish the Kingdom of God."

THE SUPPLEMENT

The collapse of France and the subjection of French civilisation to Nazi domination is, as one of the ablest contemporary observers who witnessed the tragedy at first hand has recently written, "so immense a disaster that the full extent of it cannot yet be measured, nor even understood." The causes of that collapse are of the highest interest. The writer of this week's Supplement is a Cambridge man in the early thirties. He was a history scholar, was teaching in Paris before the war and has lived in most countries of Europe.

OUR MOVE TO OXFORD

I reported three weeks ago that we had to vacate our offices at Balcombe Street on account of air-raid damage. Annandale, where we found temporary refuge, has also been damaged, and though the house is still habitable, we could not take the risk of leaving our records and machines in a quarter highly exposed to bombing attacks. A rapid decision had to be taken. Our friends at Oxford offered us a hearty welcome, and Manchester College have generously given us the use of their hall as an office. Fuller particulars about the move will be given next week.

The address of the Christian News-Letter and of the Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life will be until further notice, ARLOSH HALL, MANCHESTER COLLEGE, OXFORD.

The present temporary address of the Commission on International Friendship and Social Responsibility is 21, MEADOW WAY GREEN, LETCHWORTH, HERTS.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER

Supplement to C.N.-L. No. 51

OCTOBER 16th 1940

THE REBUILDING OF EUROPE

The greatest single factor making for the success of Herr Hitler's armies has been the political and moral bankruptcy, not only of Europe as a whole, but of every nation and people within it. The German war machine has cut through Europe, as a knife cuts through cheese, because the entire structure of the European nationalities had become rotten. Any European system which we may attempt to construct after the war will crumble in its turn unless we can place it upon firmer foundations. Second only in urgency to the task of defending our own island is, I believe, the task of re-thinking the future of Europe. The Government claim—perhaps with justice—that they must devote all their time and thought to the immediate task of securing a military victory. Few greater services can be rendered to our cause by the vast mass of thinking men and women, who are not at present engaged in war work, than by a study of the causes of European bankruptcy and of the possible foundations of a new and Christian Europe. The existence of an instructed and articulate public opinion in the months after this war may make all the difference between the peace settlement of the future and the ill-fated settlements of 1919.

The majority of the detailed work of the 1919 settlements was undertaken by men of considerable intelligence, much industry and conspicuous fairness. In so far as they failed, it was not from ignorance, nor dishonesty, nor national selfishness, but rather from lack of vision. They saw Europe piecemeal—as a collection of quarrelsome racial groups, actuated by materialistic motives. They offered Europe a system of complicated checks and counter-checks upon national selfishness, but no vision of a European or a World Commonwealth which should be based on those things which Christian men have in common, whatever may be their church or their nation. That is the measure of their failure and of our tragedy.

THE DECAY OF NATIONALISM

Nationalism had been the dominant force in Europe during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It had been the great error of the Vienna peacemakers of 1814 that they had misunderstood the importance of nationalities and had driven them underground. This error the peacemakers of Versailles, students of nineteenth century history, were determined not to repeat. They failed to realise, unfortunately for them and for us, that liberal nationalism was no longer the rising tide which it had been in the days of Mazzini and Kossuth. Throughout Europe liberal nationalism had degenerated from a crusade to a political system, appearing as reactionary to the younger generation as "enlightened despotism" had appeared to their great-grandfathers. The post-war settlements gave a fictitious semblance of life to a system which was already rotted away from within. To those of us who had the good fortune to have been in close touch with the student bodies throughout Europe, the collapse of this moribund system appeared inevitable. It was the especial tragedy of France that a succession of Foreign Ministers, born in the middle years of the previous century, identified their country with political conceptions which had aroused the enthusiasm of their own ardent, but distant, youth.

In the first half of the nineteenth century nationalism was idealistic, and usually messianic, in nature. Its prophets, though often hostile to orthodox belief, lived the lives of apostles and appealed to the crusading fire of the young. Men gave up their

lives and their fortunes for the ideal of a united Italy, a free Hungary or Belgium, a resurrected Poland. Corruption was, in the minds of the young, identified with the old autocratic governments of kings or popes or prince-bishops. The young national States consciously replaced the old religious morality by a new lay morality, based on, but independent of, Christian dogma. Even in the oldest states, such as France, liberalism replaced the Catholic faith as the guide to men's consciences. Christianity was banished from the universities and schools as outworn. Men and women were taught that they must be virtuous, because virtue was the duty of the good citizen of the national community. National allegiance replaced religious allegiance even in the consciences and the spiritual lives of men. Such religious writing as appeared, especially in France, was often little more than nationalism appealing to the religious traditions of the race. Often the writers—such as Maurice Barrès or Charles Maurras—were not practising, nor even believing, Christians. These used the Catholic saints, such as Saint Louis or Saint Joan of Arc as weapons in a struggle which was narrowly national. Others, more bare-faced, stripped the saints of all Christian character, representing them in the guise of lay apostles, forerunners of the liberal, non-supernatural religion of the nineteenth-century nation.

These sincere and enlightened nationalists failed to comprehend one of the great truths of our history—that, when once conduct is divorced from belief, conduct will deteriorate inevitably. The second generation of liberal nationalists were already the inferiors, in political and private morality, of the first. By the close of the nineteenth century the majority of the liberal states were as corrupt as their autocratic predecessors. The France of the Panama scandal and the Italy of Crispi were as much a prey to vested interests as the France of the Bourbons or the Rome of Gregory XVI and his cardinals. Those very liberal societies which had sprung up to purify public life had themselves become powerful corporations, stifling criticism, ready to use the methods of the Inquisition to defend the exclusive privilege of their members to direct the state and to fashion the minds of the young.

THE NEW RELIGIONS

By the early years of the twentieth century, Europe was in need of a new Reformation. The old Catholic and Lutheran order had crumbled before the armies of the Revolution and of Napoleon. The liberal order which had replaced it had been equally corrupt, and could make no appeal to the young and ardent. First the Christianity of the Churches, and then the diluted Christianity of the liberal States, had lost their influence over the minds of the majority of intelligent men. Stripping themselves free of all traditional shackles, many of the young welcomed with enthusiasm the Bolshevist Revolution in Russia. They demanded a cause to which they could devote the best energies of their bodies and minds. Nationalism was no longer such a cause; and from Christianity they had become completely divorced. Many became apostles of Communist revolution, giving their lives as joyfully as crusaders behind the barricades of Madrid. Others embraced Fascism, the rival supra-national faith, and sacrificed their lives in the Italy of 1921, the France of February, 1934, or the Spain of 1936. Both had found religions which demanded from them the highest standards of self-abnegation and obedience. And, to the young, it is sacrifice that appeals—not the comfortable life, the settled job, the routine obedience to a cause in which men have ceased to believe.

THE SPREAD OF DISILLUSIONMENT

The tragedy of our time is that these religions, being false religions, bring disillusion in their turn. The disillusioned Communist or Fascist becomes a worshipper of brute force, or else sinks into apathy. In countries where his political doctrine is in the ascendant, he becomes aggressively national and materialistic, casting overboard the spiritual and intellectual ideals of his cause. (A contrast between the writings and speeches of Mussolini and other Fascists of 1922-5 and those of the last two or three years is particularly instructive, as showing the complete abandonment of the primitive

ideals and the deterioration of literary form and intellectual content.) In countries where his political cause appears to have failed, the young Communist or Fascist has been driven into defeatism and to an apathetic lack of interest in political life.

In France this disillusion was particularly fatal. The old liberalism had shown its complete bankruptcy in the war of 1914-1918, when recourse had to be made to dictatorship to save France from mutiny and defeat. The dictator, Clemenceau—a man greater than any other produced by liberalism in its decline—was dragged down by his fellow-politicians soon after the peace had been signed. The old liberal system returned, with its corrupt politicians, its weak ministries, its ever-recurrent scandals. It had long ceased to wear the guise of idealism, and its leaders were frankly cynical, intent on nothing but the retention of power by themselves and their political clique. The old parties had long lost any significance. Politicians moved from group to group, while many were frank enough to describe themselves as "non-party." It would be no exaggeration to say that few, if any, Frenchmen under forty possessed the slightest faith in the old liberal religion which had been the legacy of the Revolutions of 1789, 1830 and 1848.

GROWTH OF POLITICAL LEAGUES

The more active members of the student body were early attracted by Fascism. Mussolini himself learned much from French political writers such as Maurras and Georges Sorel, and was strongly Francophil until 1936. The younger Catholic and Conservative leaders, such as Henri Massis, were great admirers of Italy and aimed at the creation of a Latin *bloc* of Italy, France, Spain and Portugal. The strongest ex-servicemen's organisation, the *Croix de Feu*, became captured by Fascist sympathisers, such as Colonel de la Rocque and the Pétain ex-minister Jean Ybarnégary. Other political leagues — the *Jeunesses Patriotes*, the *Solidarité Française*, the *Francistes*—sprung up and supported the attempts of the Royalist *Action Française* to overturn the régime. The Stavisky scandal of 1934 provided the pretext for a march on the Chamber of Deputies on the night of the sixth of February. A score of demonstrators was shot down, but the Daladier Government was forced to resign. A "National Government" was set up, under the influence of the leagues; and it seemed as if Fascism was likely to triumph in France. The "spirit of the Sixth of February" became a religion with hundreds of thousands of young Frenchmen. It had its martyrs—the men killed in front of the Chamber of Deputies—and it was expounded in an astonishing number of books and magazines, including the popular weeklies *Candide, Gringoire* and *Je Suis Partout*.

Skilful manoeuvring by the elder politicians achieved the disappearance of the Fascist menace. The leagues were very badly led, and were continuously quarrelling among themselves and accusing each other of political corruption. The younger militants, disgusted by the incompetence of their chiefs, dropped out of the leagues and became disgruntled and disillusioned grumblers, who rotted the state from within by defeatism.

COLLAPSE OF POLITICAL FAITHS

Neither nationalism nor Fascism was any longer a living faith, and the former Fascists, who included a very large proportion of the army officers, had become completely cynical and a prey to the very astute propaganda of Germany. They considered—rightly or wrongly—that the British Government had encouraged the decline of the leagues and the rise of M. Léon Blum's Popular Front. Anger at supposed British dictation of French policy since the days of sanctions was the principal reason for the French half-heartedness in the war, the early collapse of France, and the armistice. The majority of the ex-leaguers are now among the supporters of the Pétain Government, an administration which is attempting to put forward the measures which these supporters demanded six years ago. The decline of national sentiment can be gauged by the willingness of these men to hold positions under the protection of the enemy in order to carry out the programme of what was once called "*Le Nationalisme Intégral*." Charles Maurras, who dubbed Germany

"Public Enemy Number One," and who wrote *"L'Allemagne Eternelle,"* has promptly subordinated his national feeling to his political faith. He has been followed by almost every one of those writers whom men imagined to be most violently and narrowly French.

The French Communists and Socialists suffered a disillusion even more cruel than that of the French Fascists. They obtained power in 1936. They carried out almost the whole of their programme rapidly and without opposition. They created the new France, of which they had been dreaming, and found that it was inefficient, discontented and feeble. The French working-class, which had laboured for generations to secure a government such as that of M. Blum, became disgusted with the failures of that government, and became disillusioned with politics. By 1939 the French workman had lost his political faith. Allegiance to the Socialist or Communist International had destroyed the faith of the working man in the old French nationalism. The failure of the Popular Front destroyed the political faith, which had replaced this nationalism. This disillusion explains the rapidity with which the majority of French factory workers acquiesced in the armistice, and in the domination by Germany. Socialism as a political force in France appears to be dead, and we should be building on sand if we followed the advice of a certain clique to foment working-class revolution.

THE HOPE OF EUROPE

The rebuilding of Europe cannot now be political; political faiths can no longer move the hearts and the spirits of men. A moral and religious foundation is essential to the construction of any order which shall be stable and permanent. Our civilisation is Christian and cannot continue, unless animated by a revival of Christian faith. The only hope for Europe appears to lie in those small communities of Christians, both Catholic and Protestant, who live in the world and who are attempting to leaven it, as the Christian Church leavened the Roman Empire. They are the only persons whose faith remains untroubled in the bankruptcy of liberalism, the bankruptcy of nationalism and the bankruptcy of dictatorship. Theirs is a philosophy which is untouched by the changes of the passing moment. They have fought the battle for peace in their own hearts and are the only men confident of bringing order to a distracted world. They know that God has a plan for each one of them and they aim to work in harmony with His plan. The tide is with them, as it was with the Christian Church in the catacombs, and they know that their ark will weather the tempest.

The Europe of the future will be built up upon these little communities or brotherhoods. These men who have kept their peace and their confidence, because they have surrendered all things, will alone possess the spiritual vitality necessary to the remaking of the world. These small bodies of men—clergy, laymen, soldiers, non-combatants—are at present unknown to each other, divided off as they are by the sealed frontiers of wartime Europe. The close spiritual bond of prayer is, however, independent of frontiers, and all have assurance of communion in their love for every other member of the Christian brotherhood. When we have come to the end of this long dark tunnel, and creep out once more into the sunlight, then we shall be surprised to find how great has become the strength of the Christian community, and how urgently men will look to it to solve the problems caused by the bankruptcy of the secular State. Every great revolution has been the work of a disciplined minority. The Christian minority can alone rebuild Europe, and it is for the individual Christian to ensure that he is disciplining himself for the opportunity which will be offered to himself and his group. Only in so far as we have strengthened the Christian life in ourselves and our nation, shall we be capable of making a peace worthy of the sacrifices of war.

RICHARD RUSSELL.

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